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SPORTS

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Three of the oldest relatives I have on both my mother's and father's side are already in their late 80s but are still very active, undeterred by advancing age, osteoporosis, and creeping glaucoma. I believe the last time they went to a hospital and saw a doctor was on the day of their birth, if that at all; they may have been born at home, with the assistance of a midwife. Not a sick day in their lives and no vaccinations either. Up to this day, all three would wake up at the crack of dawn, one to open a small convenience story, another to open a tiny coffee shop, and the other to start preparing breakfast.

All three are my aunts, and the only physical activity I've ever seen them do is walk. Everyday. They walk to the market, the park, to visit other relatives, and to buy groceries. Despite the availability and cheapness of public transportation, their preferred method of transportation is ambulatory—the use of their legs and feet. Which is why I have such great faith in walking as a very effective means of extending life. Of course my aunts never smoked, drank little, and are spare eaters but more than the absence of these modern-day killers, I believe it is their penchant for walking and keeping active that play such a large part in giving them long, fulfilled lives. The fact that all three skipped the family's hereditary curse of diabetes is in itself a wonder.

Walking as a means to go from point A to point B has yet to catch on here in the Commonwealth. Mostly we walk because we think of it as a low-impact exercise, a means to walk off the extra calories we scarfed the previous day, or as a means to support a cause, like a fundraiser walkathon. But walking to get to the corner grocery? Heaven forbid; we use cars for that. It is no wonder why the CNMI seems to have cornered the market for non-communicable diseases—that catchall phrase for diseases like diabetes, hypertension, heart attacks, strokes, obesity, etc. We have relegated walking to something that you do either as strictly a form of exercise or stigmatized it as something that poor people do when they don't have a car. We must change this way of thinking. Walking should not just be something that you do for one hour at 5pm. It should be seen as something that we do whenever practicable, be it for going to the grocery, to church, to the library, or to the Sabalu Market. Yes, I know, we also have unleashed dogs here, so just be sure to walk softly and carry a hefty stick.

I hope you'll enjoy reading this latest edition of TAGA *Sports*. Email me at editor@saipantribune.com for comments, suggestions, and violent reactions.

JAYVEE VALLEJERA
Editor

COVER ART
Ben Allen of Australia reaches the finish line in the 2012 XTERRA Saipan.

Photography by
ROSELYN MONROYO

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WRITERS' BLOC

MARK RABAGO

Mark got to know Jess "Mr. Unorthodox" Wabol quite well when he covered the veteran par-buster and the rest of the CNMI delegation's exploits at the 2003 South Pacific Games in Suva, Fiji. Mark is glad that despite his friend's illness, Wabol remains in good spirits. Mark hopes to buy an off-road bike this summer so he can finally start his long-cherished dream of joining—and finishing—a triathlon.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

No matter how fancy and "better" players are today, Roselyn still prefers watching sports competitions (basketball particularly) in the '70s and '80s, so Kurt Barnes' story brought her back to the good old days. When her editor asked what sport/event she wants to try someday, her response: running...barefoot, in honor of Mr. Chang Whan Jang, but definitely not up Mt. Tapochao.

JON PEREZ

This is Jon's second interview and feature on former CNMI National Team member Jericho Cruz, who is optimistic for the upcoming 76th UAAP season. Jon, a former *Saipan Tribune* sports reporter, is now into running but still wants to get inside the badminton court and smash some birdie.

WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND

Walter just eclipsed his third year at *Saipan Tribune* back in March and is still hoping to land his first ever deep-sea fishing experience this summer. He hung up his baseball cleats this year, but got a brand new bowling ball from a good friend and hopes to lead Team *Saipan Tribune* out of the bottom ranks this time around in the Tan Holdings intercompany recreational league. He also wants to continue playing basketball for the exercise and perhaps some softball if his work schedule permits.

Email letters to the editor to editor@saipantribune.com or mail to PMB 34, P.O. Box 10001, Saipan MP 96950. Submissions to TAGA *Sports* must include the writer's name, village address (no P.O. boxes), and daytime phone or mobile number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity and may be published or used in any medium. All submissions become the property of the publication and will not be returned.

Tracking soccer's stars

A new technology gives coaches and fans the ability to track how fast players run, how far and many other statistics. The noninvasive system uses HD cameras to track players as they move across the field. Currently the system is used for soccer matches in the U.S. and Europe. Northbrook, Ill.-based STATS and Tel Aviv-based SportVU developed the technology last year.

How players are measured

Before each game an operator must "re-teach" the system, which includes setting up sensors that follow player movement, marking boundaries and assigning player profiles

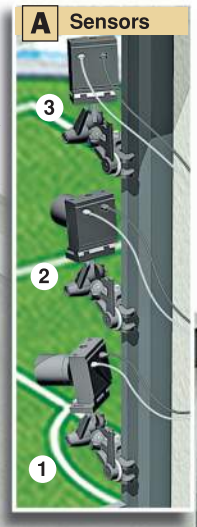
A Sensors
Three HD cameras, or sensors, in the control booth each record one third of the field

B Data processing
The live video is fed into a computer and the three camera views are brought together to form one field

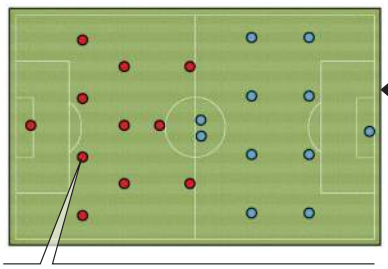
C Player recognition
Any objects (players, referees, the ball) on the field appear on the operator's computer screen as a dot; the software uses these dots to track player movement

Setting boundaries
The operator traces the out-of-bounds lines on the computer-generated field to keep the system from detecting moving objects not on the field of play

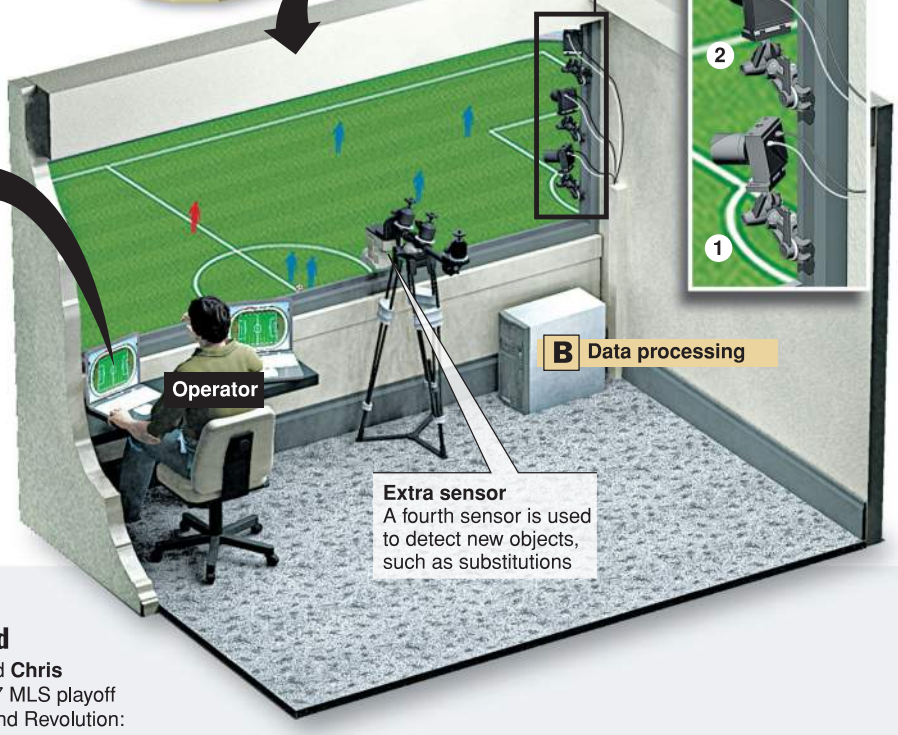
Recognizing teams
Jersey color is used to group players to teams; since lighting changes during the course of a game, the sensors can detect a spectrum of the assigned color



C Player recognition



Player profiles
At the beginning of the game, the operator assigns all players a profile, which holds player information; as the game progresses, the software tracks the player and adds the data to the player's profile; the data in each player profile is used to generate player performance chart



Covering a lot of ground

Below is Chicago Fire forward **Chris Rolfe's** report from the Nov. 7 MLS playoff game against the New England Revolution:

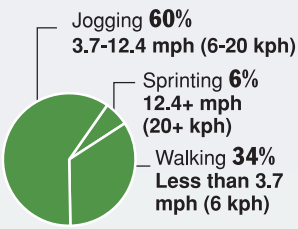
Rolfe's game stats

Speed and distance traveled can be used to determine effort, conditioning and ability

Minutes played	90
Distance covered	6.96 mi. (11.2 km)
Average speed	4.52 mph (7.3 kph)
Sprints	14

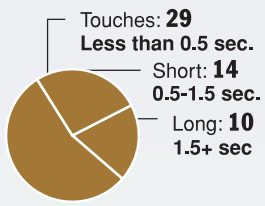
Speed distribution

Coaches can see speed over the course of a game and use the information to evaluate conditioning



Possessions

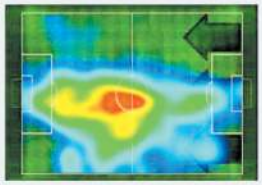
Possession indicates how active a player is in the game; some positions, such as center midfielder, should have more touches



Positioning

The map shows if a player is playing the position correctly

Red indicates where Rolfe spent the most time



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YOUR HEALTH

What is hypoglycemia?

Hypoglycemia is a condition that occurs when your blood sugar (glucose) is too low. It is also sometimes referred to as insulin shock. If not attended to immediately, hypoglycemia can have drastic effects on one's health. If your blood sugar gets too low, you may faint, have a seizure, or go into a coma.

The typical signs of low sugar levels are hunger, trembling, shakiness, nausea, pallor, and sweating. The only way to be sure it is hypoglycemia is with a blood test. Hypoglycemia is commonly linked with diabetes.

Hypoglycemia has two possible treatment approaches: treating the abnormally low blood sugar attack and treating the underlying cause.

How to prevent hypoglycemia?

- **CHECK BLOOD GLUCOSE LEVELS:** This involves keeping a regular check on blood sugar levels and knowing how to identify the onset of symptoms.
- **EAT REGULARLY:** Keep to your eating routine.
- **AVOID ALCOHOL:** A heavy drinking session can trigger hypoglycemia, so avoid them. If you have Type 1 diabetes, keep to within the daily alcohol limits recommended by your doctor, and eat something after you have had a drink.
- **EXERCISE:** Make sure you have eaten some carbohydrate-rich food before you do any exercise.
- **BE READY:** Children with Type 1 diabetes should always carry a container of sugary fruit juice or a candy bar so that they are ready if symptoms are felt. If you have diabetes, follow your diabetes management plan carefully.

SOURCES

Article compiled by TAGA Sports staff writer Moneth G. Deposa. Her sources: ▲U.S. National Library of Medicine ▲Sparkspeople (www.sparkspeople.com) ▲National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse (diabetes.niddk.nih.gov) ▲News Medical (www.news-medical.net) ▲Medical News Today (www.medicalnewstoday.com)

Eat your way to a healthy blood sugar level

Food to eat

Food that prevents hypoglycemia include fibrous and starchy carbohydrates, protein-rich food, and food rich in essential fatty acids.

Protein-rich food ensures that the complex carbohydrates are broken down very slowly so that the blood sugar levels do not rise rapidly. This, in turn, controls the secretion of insulin by the pancreas so that not too much is produced to lower the blood sugars.

Some of the food that helps prevent hypoglycemia include:

- whole grains like brown rice and wheat
- green, leafy vegetables
- carrots
- Brussel sprouts
- broccoli
- spinach
- beans and legumes
- cucumbers and zucchini
- natural, unsweetened yoghurt
- fresh fruits (mainly apples, pears and bananas)

Food to avoid

Food that causes hypoglycemia are simple carbohydrates and sugars that release high levels of sugar into the blood. It is best to stay away from sugary foods as the initial boost in sugar levels can later lead to a drastic drop as well.

Food to avoid hypoglycemia include all processed foods that are high in added sodium and sugars. Fruit juices and sweetened carbonated drinks should also be avoided. Eat plenty of fresh fruits to cut down on added sugars in juices. Others on the list include:

- red meat and fatty, fried foods
- white rice and pasta
- white flour
- ice cream
- fast foods
- tea
- coffee and other strong beverages
- any food made with sugar added to it

General guidelines for hypoglycemia

- Eat three balanced meals a day with two or three planned snacks. It is important that you don't skip meals and snacks. Try not to go any longer than 3-4 hours between eating.
- Eat the right amount of carbohydrates during each meal and snack. This helps keep your blood glucose and insulin levels in balance. Ask your doctor for a referral to meet with a registered dietitian in your area. He/she can determine the correct amount of carbohydrates for you based on your health status, body size, lifestyle activities, work routine, and fitness program.
- Avoid concentrated sugars such as white sugar, brown sugar, honey, corn syrup, and molasses. These are found in cookies, candy, cakes, pies, soft drinks, jams, jellies, ice cream, and other sweets.
- Eat food high in complex carbohydrates and fiber such as whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and beans. High-fiber foods digest more slowly and help keep glucose from "dumping" into your blood stream too quickly.
- Eat a high protein food at each meal and snack. Protein-rich food include fish, chicken, turkey, lean beef and pork, tofu, cottage cheese, cheese, yogurt, milk, eggs, peanut butter, nuts, and seeds. Protein can help maintain your blood sugar levels between meals by delaying how quickly the carbohydrate is digested.
- Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.
- Limit alcohol consumption. Always include a snack when drinking an alcoholic beverage. If you drink alcohol, limit your daily intake—no more than two drinks for men and one drink for women.
- Avoid caffeine, found in regular coffee and soda.
- Avoid large meals.

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ROSELYN B. MONROYO

LOVE IN THE TIME OF XTERRA

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA Sports Staff Writer

The 10,553 miles that separate Great Britain and Australia were no match to fate when it decided to bring together triathlon's royal couple *du jour*, Ben Allen and Jacqui Slack. Thanks to XTERRA, two people from different continents met, in the process becoming triathlon's formidable couple.

LEFT: Australia's Ben Allen and Great Britain's Jacqui Slack flash the No.1 sign after ruling the 2013 XTERRA Saipan Championship last month. **RIGHT**: Great Britain's Jacqui Slack gets a hug from boyfriend Ben Allen after crossing the finish line in the 2013 XTERRA Saipan Championship last month.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

"XTERRA brought us together," said Allen, 28, a native of Australia who recently clinched his second XTERRA Asia Tour title after winning in the Philippines, Saipan, and Guam last month.

Allen did the three legs of the Tour with Slack, 29, of Great Britain. She finished fourth in the Philippine leg due to a mechanical problem, but went on to sweep the last two stops and also prevailed in the 2013 Tagaman Triathlon, duplicating Allen's triumph.

The double victory on Saipan and Guam were Allen and Slack's second and third as a couple, having also won the XTERRA New Zealand last year. Slack also topped Tagaman in her 2012 debut on Saipan.

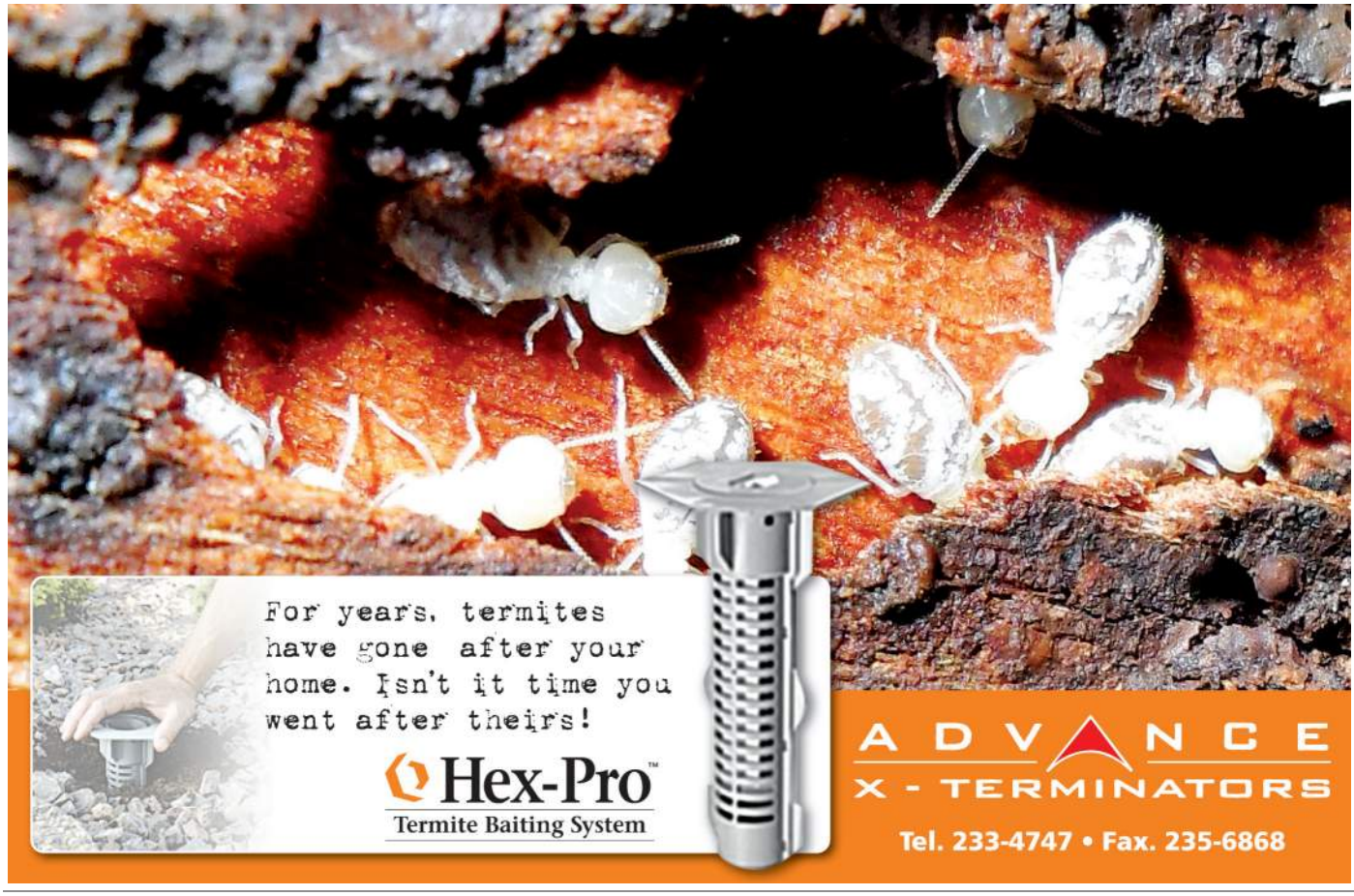
The couple achieved all these feats in less than two years of being together and after meeting just when they were still trying to find their place in triathlon.

"We met in May 2011 on the beautiful island of Sardinia in Italy. It was XTERRA Italy. We got to talking and found out that we both raced in a Professional French Grand Prix triathlon team so we arranged to meet up at the next race. We saw each other throughout the season and in September we finally became a couple," Slack said.

Slack came from a so-so performance in 2010 before she met Allen in Italy, where she finished sixth and her boyfriend placed third. Their next meeting was in XTERRA France and, again, the win was still elusive, with Allen falling out of the Top 10 and Slack not even finishing the race.

After a series of misfortunes in 2011 (with Allen fading in the bike leg in his XTERRA World debut and dropping to the No. 36th spot and Slack still trying to regain her form after being sick early that year) the couple was reunited again in November and began their journey to a spectacular series of victories.

"Jacqui came over to Australia to train with me in November 2011 and I went back with her to the UK to visit her family at Christmas. Since then, we've been inseparable, traveling to every race together and covering 25 different countries," Allen said.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ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Jacqui Slack heads to Wireless Road during the 2012 XTERRA Saipan Championship

Having each other's back

The couple counts on each other's support, especially during tough training sessions.

"We do a lot of training together but sometimes we have different sessions to do within that session so we always stick to what our coaches have programmed. We both train around 30 to 40 hours a week sometimes. We have different coaches so it is important that Jacqui does her sessions and I do mine. When we are in heavy training we may not see each other at all during the day and just have dinner together in the evening. If I have a big day of training then Jacqui will prepare dinner and I will do the same if it's the other way around," Allen said.

Before and during race day, the couple works together.

"We always pack our race kit the day before to ensure we are fully prepared. We also spend time during the week ensuring we know the course, getting massages, and eating the correct foods. So the race morning, all we need to do is wake up, warm up, and get to the start line and have fun," Slack said.

"Jacqui and I are fully supportive of each other. We both want the other to perform at their best so we work together to ensure this happens. We are there for one another if we have questions about the race, need some help with stretching or massage, and even need advice and motivation," Allen said.

As expected, Allen finishes races ahead of Slack, but he will remain at the finish line to wait for her or even return to the course to check on her. A hug at the finish line ends their race day.

Special win

No matter how far and wide the two pros travel to compete, Allen and Slack will always have XTERRA Saipan close to their hearts.

"Saipan has a special place in our hearts. We have made so many friends on the island and it is wonderful that we can honor them with a win together," said Slack.

"It's very special when we both can win on the same day; however, this is not always going to happen. It is important to support the other person whatever the situation is. I think this is something Jacqui and I are good at, along with getting support from our families, friends, and sponsors," said Allen.

The two are now back in Australia. Up next for the couple is the XTERRA Great Ocean in the Land Down Under.

While at home, Allen and Slack also get back to work. Allen is a Physical Education teacher while Slack, a former firefighter in the UK, works as a personal trainer.

"We both try to give something back to the sport by running training sessions and clinics in our hometowns. We also do many things for our sponsors like attending photo shoots, media and PR work. We love to spend our spare time with our family and friends because without their support we would not be where we are today," Allen said.

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Take a hike!

WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

ANDO AGULTO

HAIDEE V. EUGENIO

Hiking is a free and healthy hobby that almost anybody can do and all you really need is proper footwear and your own source of hydration.

Some popular hiking destinations on Saipan include trails to the Forbidden Island, the Banzai Cliff trail in Cow Town, Mt. Tapochau, Lao Lao Bay, and other numerous landmarks in Marpi, to name a few.

Many residents routinely walk along the Beach Road pathway or at the American Memorial Park and nature hikes can substitute as a nice change of scenery.

It also serves as a good way for families to spend quality time together and is an easy activity even for those who do not exercise regularly but want to start.

Many of the CNMI's trails also have historic World War II insights posted that help make the experience educational as well.

Planning a hiking trip is very easy. All you have to do is plan an agenda with some friends and perhaps even prepare a lunch picnic. You can even bring along a camera to capture some breathtaking landscapes for the memories.

For more information about hiking destinations, contact Marianas Trekking or the Marianas Visitor's Authority. Various local resorts may also have some informative pamphlets. TS

KEEP IN MIND

1. Remember, it is always safer to hike in a group and proper footwear is paramount when going off road for a day.
2. Hiking boots or at least athletic shoes are recommended when out on a day of hiking.
3. Other recommended items include a canteen or water jug, a cell phone, a flashlight, a map, food, and proper clothing depending on the weather forecast upon hitting the trail.
4. It may also be a good idea to keep a first-aid kit in your car in case of an emergency.
5. Please remember when out on the trail not to vandalize the trail markers, informative signs, or other public facilities. Don't litter or stray from the designated paths and have fun!

HAIDEE V. EUGENIO

1 The Forbidden Island is one of Saipan's favorite hiking destinations. **2** Hikers walk along another favorite hiking trail toward the Old Man By the Sea rock formation. **3** The trail going toward the Old Man By the Sea is a well-trodden path and is challenging enough for first-time hikers.

Tan Holdings

SPORTS CALENDAR

2013

APRIL

- Series of qualifying tournaments for 2013 PSS/McDonald's All Schools Championships — Athletics competition for both the public and private schools in the CNMI.
- 2013 CNMI Junior Tennis Championships – A Northern Mariana Islands Tennis Association-sanctioned event for U12, U15, and U18 players.
- 2013 PIC Tennis Championships – A Pacific Islands Club-sponsored event for both junior and adult players from CNMI and Guam.
- 2013 COPSSA Basketball League Playoffs – Basketball competition for the varsity teams of the various private schools on Saipan.

MAY

- 2013 PSS/McDonald's All Schools – Culmination of the series of athletics trials with Northern Marianas Athletics awarding the champions in the elementary, junior high, and high school divisions.
- 2013 CNMI National Athletics Championship – Feature the CNMI athletes competing in running, throwing, and jumping events.
- 2013 Escape from Managaha – A swim race from Managaha to Micro Beach.
- 2013 Junior ITF Circuit – The first Junior ITF tournament that CNMI will be hosting and will feature U18 players from around the world.
- 2013 IT&E Singles & Mixed Doubles Badminton Tournament – A Northern Marianas Badminton Association-sanctioned tournament.
- 2013 NMIFA Youth Spring Football Festival – Gathering of the youth football teams from the various clubs on Saipan.
- 2013 May Masters (Bowling) –The battle of the best bowlers in the CNMI with some Guam players expected to compete, too.
- 2013 Saipan Little League Baseball (championships) – The battle of the king of the diamond in the Major, Junior, Senior, and Big League divisions.

JUNE

- 2013 Annual Silver Streak Run – a run race from DFS to Oleai and back and held in honor of DFS' Tom Picarro.
- 2013 Oceania Area Championship (athletics) – CNMI athletes battling the best in Oceania region.
- 2013 North Pacific Qualifying Tournament (tennis) – CNMI tennis players go up against representatives of Guam, Palau, and FSM.

This advertisement is sponsored by
Tan Siu Lin Foundation

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Saipan International School's Clay McCullough-Stearns shows TAGA *Sports* his serving form.

Clay McCullough-Stearns beamed with pride when his father Tony won the NMASA Male Athlete of the Year award in 2004 for sailing. Eight years later, it was Tony's turn to take pride in his son's NMASA Male Student Athlete of the Year plum, this time for volleyball.

That earns the Stearns the distinction of being the first father-and-son tandem in CNMI sports history to bring home the top athlete accolade.

"When my dad received the Athlete of the Year award in 2004, I was 8 years old. I was not present at the ceremony, but I was very proud of my dad when I later heard about the award," Clay said. "One of my goals was to be honored at the NMASA banquet too. I set this goal a few years ago when I first learned of other athletes being honored."

Clay got NMASA's nod after his numerous victories in various volleyball tournaments (both indoor and beach) in 2012.

Clay piloted Saipan International School to a championship sweep of both the MISO and COPSSA indoor volleyball leagues and also took MVP honors in the two competitions. He also scored numerous victories in beach volleyball, prompting NMIVA (Northern Mariana Islands Volleyball Association) to nominate him and John Nekaifes as CNMI representatives to the 2013 University Games in Kazan, Russia. The pair is only the second team from Oceania that will play in the University ➜

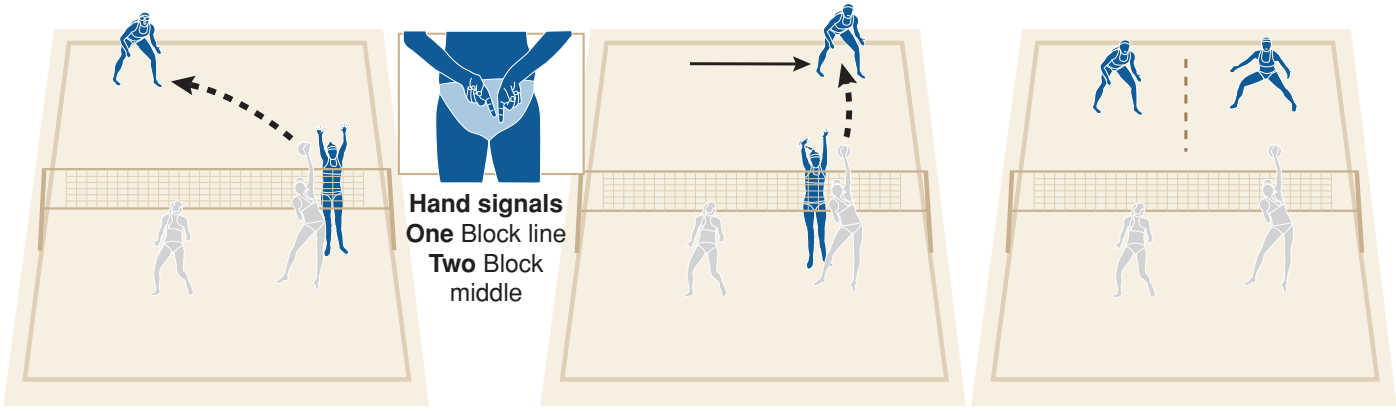
Father and son Tony Stearns and Clay McCullough-Stearns pose with their NMASA Male and Male Student Athletes of the Year trophies during a photo shoot at the family-owned Marianas Medical Center in Garapan.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Keys to beach volleyball success

On defense: Covering the court

Before the serve, the blocker will signal behind his back which side of the court he will be blocking; after he serves, his teammate can then adjust his position accordingly.



Blocking the line

When hand signals indicate the blocker will protect the line, the back row player moves to cover the middle/opposite side of the court.

Blocking the middle

When hand signals indicate the blocker will cover the middle, the back row player moves over to protect the line.

Without a block

If neither player blocks, each is responsible for half the court; balls hit to the middle are covered by the defender cross-court from the hitter.

On offense: Start with a tough serve

Jump serve

Both players' jump serves arrive with the force of a spike, making it more difficult for the defense to make a good pass.

Dig and pass

Cover the court well on digs and make a good pass to the other player to set—even on the move.

Good set makes a good hit

A good pass allows your teammate to make a predictable set, allowing you to survey the court for the spike.

Source: Los Angeles Times

Games this year (Australia is the other one).

Tony saw all these accomplishments coming for Clay.

"Clay has done well in many sports, and he has worked really hard, especially at volleyball the last few years. I'm not at all surprised he's excelled at it. Clay is very athletic and good at whatever sport he tries, including sailing. He understands the wind intuitively and he has picked up the basics of sailing and kite-boarding really quickly. But he's been very good at quickly picking up pretty much whatever sport he has tried," Tony said.

He recounts that Clay is very focused on improving his volleyball game, as his son always seeks advice from coaches and veteran players, watches videos on how to develop one's skills and actual games, and recognizes other factors affecting his game.

"He is aware what variables are affecting the play like wind and shadows and sun glare, things like that," Tony said.

Clay echoed this, saying he looks up to Saipan veteran players and pushed himself harder after a so-so debut in 2011.

"My first real volleyball competition was the Marianas Cup in 2011. Because I was still new to the sport and lacked knowledge about how to play the sport, I did not do very well. This encouraged me to pursue the game and practice harder. There are a number of adults in the volleyball community to whom I look up to. Some of them include my coach with SIS Ms. Mili (Saiki), Tyce Mister, and Russ Quinn. Most of the adult players on Saipan always give tips on how I can improve in certain areas," said the 17-year-old athlete, who is also into tennis and soccer.

Add skiing, snowboarding, diving, skateboarding, surfing, athletics, and sailing to Clay's list and you have a multi-sports athlete encouraged by his parents to participate in sports, win or lose.

"Participating, trying hard, and doing your best are what really matter, whether in sports or any other activities. In sport, winning is fun and rewarding, but it's important to remember that the losers in sport aren't the people who finish last; it's the people who sit on the side and never compete. The losers are the people who don't even try," Tony said.

Zeng Zung brings MMA to Tinian

Team Zeng Zung forms an alliance with Trench Tech and has routinely exhibited strong showings in the latter's local events.

WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND
TAGA Sports Staff Writer

Mixed martial arts is one of the most popular and fastest growing sports today and the craze is well evident in the CNMI, especially on Saipan with the success of team Trench Tech Purebred and its promotions. However, there are other fight teams out there, including Tinian up-and-comer Team Zeng Zung.

I recently sat down with the group's founder, Joshua Castro, to learn more about his stable and what it stands for.

Zeng Zung (traditionally written as Yeng Yung) translates to "shake or shake it off" and is coincidentally also the name of Castro's clothing line that he started with a former partner in 2008.

The clothing line remains a separate entity from the fight team itself and is sported by local household names like Frank "The Crank" Camacho and Keli "The Ruckus" Manglona. Camacho is studying under Master Lloyd Irvin in Camp Springs, Maryland, and Manglona represents Siege MMA in Glendale, Arizona.

Castro uses viral marketing to promote the clothing brand, which can be found on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube (email zzttbdp@yahoo for more information). Products will also be available for sale locally at The Trapp once it reopens.

The fight team itself was originally formed in January 2010, though the name became official a couple of months later.

The decision on the name came from original members, which include Gerry Mundo and Craig Borja, among a few other current members at the time, as an homage to Castro upon his departure for Las Vegas, Nevada where he used to reside. Castro now works six months of the year as a wildland firefighter in Fresno, California.

He was actually home on vacation when he was first approached by aspiring fighters to help train them after learning that he was studying Brazilian jiu-jitsu at Legion BJJ in Vegas; over time the stable has grown to five core members.

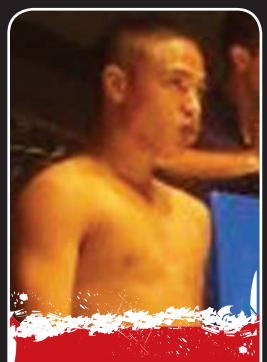
Castro's love for the sport spurred him to support their cause, whether through financial means, the purchase of miscellaneous equipment and, of course, training tutelage.

He jumps back and forth during the six months he is not on call to work on his clothing line, fight team, and other projects such as his recent foray into the music scene as a rapper under the handle Zos Zeng Zung.

Notably, Team Zeng Zung has, more or less, formed an alliance with Trench Tech over the years and has routinely exhibited strong showings in the latter's local events. Trech Tech members visited Tinian last March and appeared alongside the Zeng Zung crew for an anti-bullying demonstration and "boxersize" clinic at Tinian High School.

Moreover, there are potentially four Zeng Zung bets appearing in Trench Tech's upcoming Rites of Passage 14 - Mayhem! event.

The fighters below represent Castro's core members that have stuck with the program and remained dedicated to the group even when Castro is in the mainland.



Name: Craig "Earthquake" Borja
Age: 23
Weight: 135 lbs
Fight Record: 3W-1L
Village: San Jose

Name: Peter "The Beast" Cepeda Jr.
Age: 21
Weight: 145 lbs
Fight Record: 2W-3L
Village: Marpo Heights 1

Name: Rino "Animot" Reyes
Age: 24
Weight: 155 lbs
Fight Record: 1W-0L
Village: San Jose

Name: Justo "Gayo" Castro (Kick Boxer)
Age: 17
Weight: 135 lbs
Fight Record: 0W-0L
Village: San Jose

Name: Regino "The Kid" Mundo (Kick Boxer)
Age: 19
Weight: 135lbs
Fight Record: 5W-1L-1D (all K-1 Kick Boxing)
Village: San Jose

JERICHO CRUZ

King Falcon ready to spread wings

JON PEREZ
TAGA *Sports* Contributing Writer

Adamson University coach Leo Austria is hoping that the coming 76th University Athletic Association of the Philippines season would be the breakout year for Filipino-American recruit Jericho Cruz when the Soaring Falcons start their campaign in the Philippines' premier collegiate league.

Austria, one of the top playmakers during his time in the Philippine Basketball Association and the 1985 Rookie of the Year in Asia's first play-for-pay league, said that Cruz had a roller coaster first season in the UAAP.

This year he wants the ex-Rizal Technological University Blue Thunder to step up and move out of the shadows of his former, more illustrious teammates Eric Camson and Alex Nuyles, who have already used up their playing years.

"He played good last season; he was able to keep up. But I'm hoping he becomes more consistent and continue to play hard this season," said Austria, who aims to better the Soaring Falcons' sixth place record last year (3-11) when they host the UAAP's 76th season.

"Maybe he felt the pressure in his first few games since it was a big adjustment on his part. It was his first time playing in front of a big crowd," Austria added.

Cruz was literally thrown into the UAAP's bright lights, with some sports writers tagging him as one of the rookies to watch last year.

"[The UAAP] was different from the other leagues that I played in the Philippines. Maybe first game jitters [because] I did not expect how big the crowd was, and with all that media and TV attention in the UAAP," said Cruz, who began playing basketball at the Garapan Basketball Court.

NONOY LACZA

Adamson Falcons guard and former CNMI national player Jericho Cruz drives against Terrence Romeo of Far Eastern University during last season's University Athletic Association of the Philippines.

He said the basketball level is really high in the Philippines. "When I was playing on Saipan I used to score 30 or 40 points but here you've got to earn your points. Whatever you do, you've got to work for it.

"I was happy and proud to finally make it to the UAAP. But at the same time, I was also nervous since if I make a mistake it will be seen by everybody on national, even international, TV. It was a really tough time for me."

Cruz—who was born in the Philippines but grew up on Saipan, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' largest island—played second stringer to Nuyles, usually coming off the bench when Austria gives his starting No. 2 guard some rest.

Cruz's time to shine finally came when the 6-foot-2 Nuyles was injured, giving Cruz more playing time.

The former Marianas High School standout and many-time CNMI national team member did not disappoint, revitalizing the Falcons' anemic offense and even tallying 19 points in the San Marcelino-based dribblers' 69-67 win over the University of the Philippines.

Cruz was held to single digits in Adamson's next two losses, before scoring 14 in another setback and had his first unproductive match in the Falcons' 60-61 loss to University of Santo Tomas. He played more consistently after that and even had a 33-point production in another loss to UST in the second round.

"Coach Leo helped me build my confidence. He always reminds us of doing the small things inside the court, to stick to his system and avoid making the same mistakes on the court," said Cruz—who averaged 12.6 points (ninth last season with a 41.4 percent shooting clip), 4.0 rebounds, and 3.0 assists per game.

Adamson's coaching staff has already made changes with the Falcons' rotation, especially with Camson, Nuyles, and bench players James Deans, Allen ➜

Etrone, and Jeffrey Olalia using up their UAAP playing years.

Austria said that Cruz will be part of Adamson's new scoring trio, together with big man Rodney Brondial, who will slide down from the center to the power forward spot, and 6-foot-10 Cameroonian behemoth Ingrid Sewa, who already finished his two-year residency.

Adamson's new triumvirate has already produced some results, with the Falcons placing third in last year's UniGames in Bacolod and an undefeated elimination round campaign in the Philippine Collegiate Champions League, a seven-game sweep, before being eliminated by University of Santo Tomas in the quarterfinals.

Cruz even tallied 37 points, seven rebounds, and four assists in Adamson's 88-79 triumph over National Collegiate Athletic Association powerhouse San Sebastian College. He averaged 20 points a game in the PCCL.

Cruz still has two more playing years left in the UAAP, but this early he's already being recruited by a number of teams in the PBA D-League.

"I'm going to play in the D-League after season 76. Then let's see what happens next," said Cruz.

His ultimate dream is to play in the PBA someday. "If given the chance, I also want to play for Gilas (the Philippine Men's National Team)."

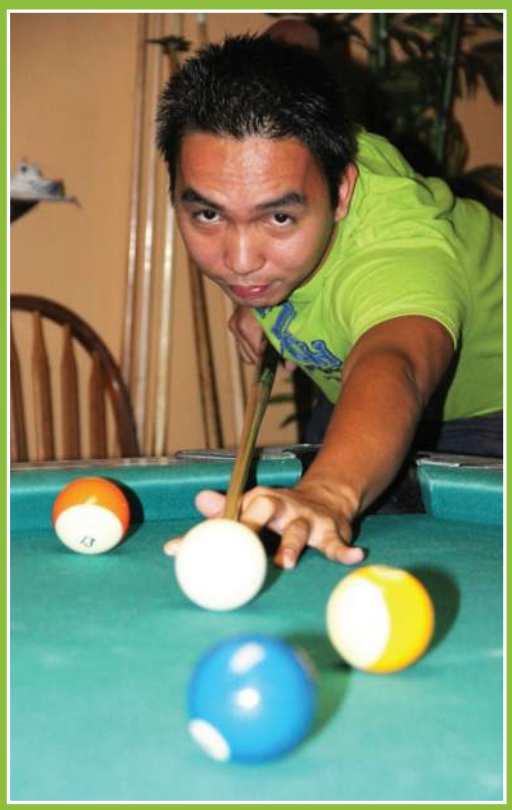
Despite his rising basketball career in the Adamson community, Cruz remains in touch with his simple island roots.

"I wasn't expecting this. It just happened and I'm really proud of what I have done to get here. I'm hoping that my folks back home are proud of what I've been doing. I'm the only one who made it right here. They watch the games online and some other video clips on YouTube."

Cruz, from time to time, returns to Saipan and even helped CNMI Men's National Basketball coach Rufino Aguon hold a clinic for kids. "Edsel [Mendoza] is now coaching the young kids. I just helped them out with the skills training and shared with them what have I learned while playing in the Philippines." TS

8 Q's for an 8-ball expert

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor



Chester Hamoy could very well be the Commonwealth's best billiards player.

The 29-year-old native of Dipolog City, Zamboanga del Norte in the Philippines currently plays for Fiesta Resort & Spa in the Saipan Billiards Association's Tuesday 8-Ball League.

Last season, the 5'7" Fiesta Resort waitstaff was named the Most Valuable Player of the SBA 8-Ball League when he suited up for a former team, IT&E Incredibles.

No less than pool legend and one of the sport's all-time greats, Roger "The Ghost" Espiritu, attests to the right-hander's proficiency with the cue stick.

Now semi-retired, Espiritu says that Hamoy is one of the up-and-coming cue artists on the island and he sees a worthy successor in him.

Saipan Billiards Association coordinator Warlee Ellama said that, while Hamoy has yet to translate his individual success to team championships, he did lead the IT&E Incredibles to the Budweiser Cup diadem in the Winter/Spring 2012 season of SBA.

"Chester is the best in my opinion because he makes everything look so simple. His accuracy and cue ball control is very good. Playing billiards is all about pocketing the ball and preparation for the next shot and this is where Chester excels."

In all Hamoy has won a total of four MVP awards—the Winter/Spring 2010, Winter/Spring 2011, Winter/Spring 2012, and Summer/Fall 2012 MVPs.

"We have a lot of talented billiards players on island but I will give credit to Chester Hamoy. In the SBA Open 8-Ball League he has won the MVP award several times already. At his young age he seems to keep getting better every season. Certainly he is always the man to beat," Ellama said.

TAGA *Sports* caught up with Hamoy last month and gave the 8-ball champion eight questions to answer.

When did you arrive on Saipan and did you play billiards right away?
I came here to Saipan on Oct. 11, 2008. I started playing billiardS since I was in the Philippines. I just continued playing here.

What leagues are you currently playing in and what team are you suiting up?
I joined the SBA league again and our weekly game is every Tuesday night. I am the team captain for this season.

How would you describe your billiards game?
I am aggressive and focused.

How did you get started in billiards and was there a pool player you looked up to while growing up?
I started in my hometown in Dipolog City until I went to Las Piñas, Manila where I joined the 9-ball tournament. I got to beat one of their best players. I really wanted to follow the steps of Efren "Bata" Reyes.

How many tournaments on Saipan have you won and what's the most memorable?
I actually cannot remember the exact number because since I came here I've been playing whenever they challenge me. I can say that the most memorable winning moment was during our tournament when we challenged Guam players. I beat them three times.

What's the most incredible shot you made?
There was this local tournament at Top Pool Bar. I shot the 8-ball long pocket. I thought there was no chance but I took the risk for the championship and I made it.

What other things do you want to accomplish in the sport?
I want to win not only here on Saipan but also in other places if there's a chance I can join tournaments there.

Any advice to aspiring pool players?
They must love the sport. Focus and practice a lot. It requires eight hours of practice a day. TS

STRETCHING

BEFORE OR AFTER?

MCT | Cindy Trowbridge demonstrates a stretching exercise, to be done before working out, at the University of Texas at Arlington, Texas, July 28, 2010.

By LESLIE BARKER GARCIA
The Dallas Morning News

TYPES OF STRETCHING

▲ **DYNAMIC STRETCHING** is basically a foreshadowing of the workout to come: arms in circles if you're a swimmer, for instance; walking or skipping if you're a runner; maybe doing knee lifts for other movements.

MCT

Cindy Trowbridge demonstrates a "dynamic" stretch, to be done before a workout, at the University of Texas at Arlington, Texas, July 28, 2010.

▲ **STATIC STRETCHING** involves held poses: leaning over an outstretched leg or bending toward the ground for 30 seconds or so.

MCT

Cindy Trowbridge demonstrates a "static" stretch, to be done after a workout, at the University of Texas at Arlington, Texas, July 28, 2010.

The one theory of stretching everyone seems to agree on can be summed up in two words:

Don't bounce.

After that, pull the ring tab and step back. Broaching the topic, triathlon coach Tommy Johnson says, is like "opening up a can of worms."

What, you may ask, could possibly be contentious about something that is supposed to keep you injury-free and immune from soreness?

Plenty, it turns out. "There is a bit of a controversy about whether you should stretch at all," says Dallas trainer Ron Incerta.

When USA Track & Field conducted a clinical trial of almost 3,000 runners, the results, published last month, were essentially a wash: Those who stretched had the same injury risk as those who didn't.

A Nebraska Wesleyan University study deflated another theory, the idea that flexibility achieved through stretching makes for a better runner. The results showed that runners with tighter muscles are more economical runners—that is, they use oxygen more efficiently—than those who are more flexible.

"If you want to stretch because you're tight and think you'll become more flexible, I don't see that as the case," says Plano, Texas, physical therapist Jake Spivey. "Stretching isn't to improve the length of the tissue, but to prepare the tissue for exercise and not create injury during the course of it. If you just take off, you can create overuse issues such as tendonitis or bursitis."

What does work best? It's a matter, Incerta says, of "dynamic vs. static stretching."

A quick lesson here. Dynamic stretching is basically a foreshadowing of the workout to come: arms in circles if you're a swimmer, for instance; walking or skipping if you're a runner; maybe doing knee lifts for other movements.

Static, on the other hand, involves held poses: leaning over an outstretched leg or bending toward the ground for 30 seconds or so.

Until February, triathlete Brett Skyllingstad began his workouts with traditional static stretches. Then he did some research and learned that muscles aren't ready for such movement before a workout. Now for 10 minutes before he begins, he focuses on knee lifts, side steps and leg swings. His post-workout stretches are what his beforehand stretches once were, holding positions for 30 seconds or so.

"I've noticed a huge difference," says Skyllingstad, 26, project manager for a construction company and triathlon coach for Texas Triple Threat. "I don't start out feeling flat or have that normal 10 minutes of feeling crummy or awkward. It gets your blood moving and flowing, and your heart rate more elevated."

That gradually increased blood flow is necessary for a successful workout, says Dr. Cindy Trowbridge, associate professor of kinesiology at the University of

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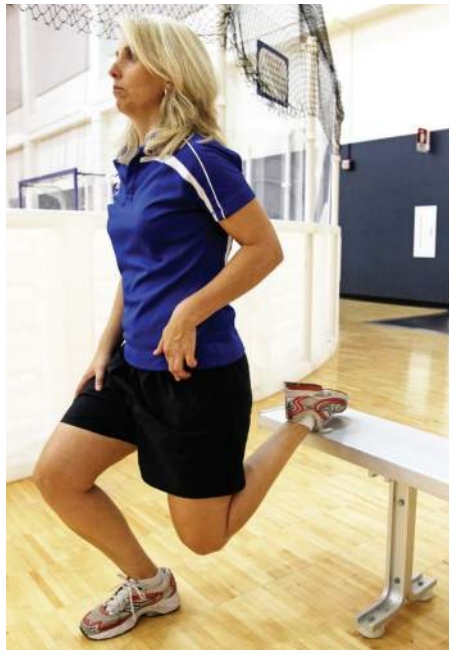
MCT

Cindy Trowbridge demonstrates a "dynamic" stretch, to be done before a workout, at the University of Texas at Arlington, Texas, July 28, 2010.


MCT

Cindy Trowbridge demonstrates a "static" stretch, to be done after a workout, at the University of Texas at Arlington, Texas, July 28, 2010.

Texas at Arlington.

"It's cardiovascular, getting your heart rate up and your heart warmed up so it's now going to pump blood to your muscles instead of your organs," says Trowbridge, clinical education coordinator of UTA's athletic training education program. "In a resting state, blood is primarily distributed to the organs: the heart, the brain. It's secluded from the muscles unless you're using them."

Warming up with dynamic stretches starts the blood moving from organs to muscles, says physical therapist Spivey, whose practice is SportsCare and Rehabilitation.

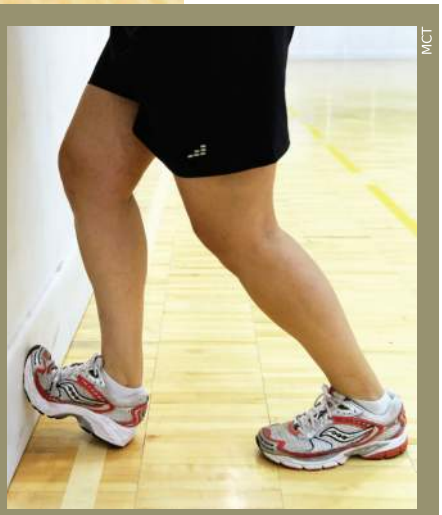
"You're getting the blood flowing, which improves the pliability of the tendon and muscle," says Spivey, who does dyanamic stretching for 10 minutes before a workout and static for 10 after. "You're getting your heart rate elevated enough so blood is getting to the tissue, whether you're skipping, doing a lateral shuffle or high knees."

Many amateurs, whether running, biking or swimming, just take off and start going, he continues. "They think, 'I'm healthy now!' But if you just take off, you can create overuse issues such as tendonitis or bursitis. It takes longer to strengthen muscles and joints than it does to strengthen your cardiovascular system."

Incerta likens the warming-up process to starting a car in the middle of winter.

"It won't run as efficiently if it's been sitting in 30-degree weather," he says. "The gears aren't going to shift right. But if you turn it on and warm it up for 10 to 15 minutes, it will be fine. Fluids are going through the pipes. No problems. It's similar to the central nervous system of the body. If you're not primed, you're not ready to actually do physical work. Warming up gets all that fluid going."

On the other side of the workout is when Trowbridge advocates the stretching we tend to think of when we hear the word. You're telling your body the workout's over, she says. You're allowing it to rest, to start repairing itself from this workout and to start preparing itself for the next one.


MCT

Cindy Trowbridge demonstrates a "static" stretch, to be done after a workout, at the University of Texas at Arlington, Texas, July 28, 2010.

"You've been dramatically active," she says. "It's important to bring the body back down. You don't put a kid who just had cotton candy to bed right away. You read a story. So after you exercise, you have to quiet down, to cool down. Your muscles are moderately fatigued and more responsive to being elongated or stretched because they're so warm. It's like putting cold taffy in the microwave."

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Kurt Barnes, seventh from left, poses with fellow CNMI Sports Hall of Famers during the 2012 NMASA Awards Banquet held at the Kanoa Resort in February this year.

KURT BARNES BLAST FROM THE PAST

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

History, in general, bores me but it's a different story when long-time resident Kurt Carl Barnes regales me with bits and pieces of CNMI sports history between tournament breaks.

Bits and pieces, however, would not do for a sports junkie so I finally got Barnes to sit down and share his recollection of stories of triumphs, legendary athletes, and innovations in CNMI sports after more than four decades of being on the scene.

Pioneer sports, makeshift venues

The San Bruno/Millbrae, Calif., native came to Saipan in January 1967 as a Peace Corps volunteer and was assigned to teach English as a second language at Chalan Kanoa Elementary School (now the William S. Reyes Elementary School). He then moved to public education's central office as its physical education coordinator.

"When I landed on Saipan, there was a six-team basketball league, which was played at Mt. Carmel's gym, an elephant Quonset hut on a long, narrow cement floor. The gym was packed every night as it was the only thing to do on Saipan at the time. Once in a while there were fast-pitch softball and baseball games. The women had a fast-pitch softball league and games were played on Sundays where the Joeten-Kiyu Public Library now sits. Hundreds of spectators would watch these games, as again, nothing else to do on Sundays," said Kurt.

"Facilities were really lacking. The only real facilities in the late '60s were the Mt. Carmel gym, the softball/baseball field in Susupe, and a field at Mt. Carmel. However, no one even thought of complaining about facilities, as you used what was available at the time."

As a physical education coordinator, Barnes started an elementary school interscholastic league in 1967 and held competitions in fast-pitch softball, volleyball, and track and field for both girls and boys.

"The end of the school competition was always the Junior Olympics, a track and field championship held at the CK Elementary School. I had a 167-yard oval built in the middle of the elementary school's grassy field, and we held dual meets between schools and then an all-day championship final there," Barnes said.

In the athletics competition, an old mattress was the cushion for the high jump event, while ropes were used at the finish line of running events, with most of the participants running barefoot.

"Some great competition and some of the all-time athletes began their sports careers during these elementary games. Reno Celis, Tony Satur, Jesus Pinaula, Angel Falig, Jesus Dela Cruz, Pedro Salas Delos Reyes, and Diane Camacho were some of the best athletes to come out of these games," Barnes said.

"Saipan now has a world-class track facility, one of the two best such facilities in the entire Oceania region, other than Australia and New Zealand. Only Fiji has a comparable track. In the 1969 Micronesian Games held on Saipan, the track was crushed coral with discarded motor oil for lane markers."

The first Micro Games also featured a makeshift pool.

"The swimming pool was in the lagoon at the Garapan Fishing Base. [The] pool

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

ABOVE: Peace Corps volunteers take photos and time of Dionisia Angui in the 100m race in the 1968 Junior Olympics held at the Chalan Kanoa Elementary School (now William S. Reyes Elementary School). **RIGHT**: Mae Quitano competes in the high jump event in the 1968 Junior Olympics held at the Chalan Kanoa Elementary School (now William S. Reyes Elementary School).

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

was made of plywood, oil-drums, ropes and coconuts. No swimming pool existed at that time, so the creative minds of those in charge provided the next best thing."

Rivalries, dominant teams

Barnes played basketball and football in the U.S. mainland but got into volleyball and coaching upon coming to Saipan.

His volleyball team—called Breakers and led by Rick Duenas, Tino Olopai, and Joe C. Guerrero—won 50 straight games for three seasons in the late '60s, competing against 11 other teams and traveling to different villages. Barnes said their fiercest rival was a team from San Roque.

"My all-time favorite story is a volleyball game in San Roque. The whole village of San Roque came out to cheer on their team and blast the Breakers. The game was really tense. It went down to a third game and the Breakers refused to be beaten, especially in front of a very hostile environment. Rick, I, John Duenas, and Joe C. Guerrero made some great plays at the end to win the game. Certainly, the cream of the athletic world rose to the occasion that day," said Barnes, who also coached the team.

The Breakers also had a men's basketball squad and dueled the highly favored All-Peace Corps Team.

"The Peace Corps team was loaded with highly skilled players but we always gave them a great game. There was one championship game that the Peace Corps won by one point, after I missed a layup at the end that would have won the championship for the Breakers," Barnes said.

In women's fast-pitch, played every Sunday at the field where the public library now stands, Barnes coached Oleai for 10 years and helped the squad win three or four league pennants and two or three playoff championships. Oleai was one of the best teams Barnes coached.

"My first practice with this team will always be etched in my memory. The skill level of most of these players was off the charts. Cecilia Lisua played first base and was so talented that she could have played professionally in the United States. The shortstop and catcher, sisters Maria and Irmina Pua, were also highly skilled. The pitcher, Maggie Olopai (Taitano) was in a class by herself. She possessed a great fastball that was unhittable, a wonderful attitude toward sports, and a willingness to always get better. She was required to throw 50 pitches during every practice to build a stronger arm and increase her pitch velocity, as if she needed any more miles per hour on her pitches."

Besides Oleai, other dominant teams on Saipan from the '60s to the '80s were the Garapan Kickers and the Toyota Wheels. The Kickers, composed of Marianas High School students, topped soccer tournaments in the '80s, while the Toyota Wheels reigned supreme in men's baseball during the same decade.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

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ABOVE: Jesus Pinaula, left, of San Roque Elementary School beats Benusto Tagabuel of Oleai Elementary School in the 100m race for sixth graders during the 1968 Junior Olympics held at the Chalan Kanoa Elementary School (now William S. Reyes Elementary School). **LEFT**: Kurt Barnes huddles with the CNMI Volleyball Team during the 1969 Micronesian Games on Saipan.

Legends

Barnes considers several players from his Oleai fast-pitch team as legends.

Lisua, a member of the 2005 Class of the CNMI Sports Hall of Fame, was one of them. In a 10-day game stretch, Lisua had 36 RBIs, posted a slugging percentage of 200 (equivalent to getting a double every time at bat), batted .650, and earned an on-base percentage of .800.

"All of these stats were against fairly good pitching," said Barnes, who also made special mention of Olopai-Taitano.

"Maggie pitched 8 shutouts during those 10 games. Most games never made it past the 5th inning due to the 10-run rule," he said.

Other players whom Barnes considers outstanding in their times were Rick Duenas, Tino Olopai, Joe C. Guerrero, and Danny Camacho in various sports and J.J. Cruz in basketball and Dr. Manny Sablan in baseball. Lisua, Maria and Irmina Pua and Maggie Olopai-Taitano in fast-pitch softball made up the elite women's field.

Duenas was still a dominant force in the 1970s and was joined by Tony Satur and Jesus Pinaula and Jess Dela Cruz from San Roque in baseball and softball, while David Blanco topped basketball.

In the 1980, Lisua was still a force in any sport she played in. However the young Joyce Taro was becoming a great player, along with Margo Celis in softball, while the Chong sisters, Bertha and Dolores, dominated volleyball and basketball, and Tony Rogolifoi stamped his class in both baseball and basketball. In the 1990s, there was baseball's Tony Benavente, and swimming's Xenavee Pangelinan and Jonathan Sakovich.

Legacy

Every year at the NMASA Annual Sports Banquet, Barnes would see these legends get together and he couldn't help but take pride in helping shape the Commonwealth's sports icons.

"When I see athletes today enjoying themselves at the various athletic venues on Saipan, I have a deep sense of self-fulfillment. I see their happiness and sense of self-pride in being able to enjoy playing on appropriate athletic facilities. They don't know it, but I am a part of their happiness and maturation, and always will be," said Barnes, who chairs a NMASA committee that oversees nominations for the CNMI Sports Hall of Fame.

"I was one of the few pioneers and founders of the sports program that is in place today within the CNMI. The groundwork was laid properly and by the book in the late '60s. It wasn't perfect, but it worked and began the journey and trek to where the CNMI is today. Someone had to conceive it. I often think that I was very blessed to have been at the right place and at the right time. But at the same time, I knew what needed to be done and more importantly I knew how to do it. This is my legacy," he said.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

MARK RABAGO

JESS WABOL

MR. UNORTHODOX IS ALSO MR. PRAGMATIC

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Jess "Mr. Unorthodox" Wabol poses with his wife Vivian and daughters Jessmin, right, and Tini while being surrounded by just a few of the championship golf and baseball trophies he accumulated throughout the years.

While heath problems have forced Jess "Mr. Unorthodox" Wabol to finally hang up his golf clubs, the veteran par-buster has not totally abandoned the sport.

The 2007 NMASA Sports Hall of Fame inductee is now officially retired from golf, having played his last round in February 2012 after a bout of dehydration sidelined him for months. Wabol was eventually diagnosed with kidney failure, requiring twice-a-week dialysis at the Commonwealth Health Center.

Any person—even an athlete— would be rocked back by this sudden twist of fate but not Wabol, a native of Anatahan Island.

"Kidney failure and my lungs were full of water, making it difficult for me to breathe. I'm not going to feel sorry for myself though. I'm 55 years old and I enjoyed 54 years of my life. There's

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

PAR-BUSTERS

When Jess Wabol first played golf on island, it was dominated by the likes of Tony Taitano, Jess Taitano, R.C. Cabrera, Jess Aldan, and John Salas.

Through the years he came to respect the likes of Satur, Jeff Taylor, Joe "Kamikaze" Camacho, former presiding judge Edward Manibusan, Nick Sablan, Frank Castro, and Lloyd Hartman.

He also became friends with—of all players—Guamanian golfer Luis Sunga. "He and I are very good friends. He's one of the very few Guamanian [players] that I respect. Only him and Mike Castro."

Of the new crop of par-busters, he likes the golf games of J.J. Atalig, Carl Hocog, Ned Noritz, and Joey Dela Cruz.

Wabol with good friend Ed "Doi" Tenorio, second from right, and two of his friends in his favorite place in the world—the golf course.

always a point you have to accept that it's the end," he said during a candid yet spirited interview with TAGA *Sports* last month.

The former Oleai Elementary School principal even made light of his condition.

"I'm just saying that the older you get your lifespan is getting shorter. My childhood friend Tony Satur, after he learned about my condition, called and freaked out. He asked me if I was not scared of dying and I told him 'If God tells you you're next tomorrow and you say 'no,' you have no choice, you're going tomorrow, right?'"

While he can no longer play his favorite sport, Wabol said he finds ways to keep busy—as long as he gets his two-to three-hour siesta in the afternoon.

"Even with my condition, I would never turn down anyone asking for my help whether it be for NMASA, for golf, or whatever. My only limitation is the heat. I just cannot stay out in the sun for a long time. Even driving midday is a chore. By 12pm or 1pm I'm already drained. I have to go home and sleep. I still exercise by doing odd chores around the house…walking around the house, picking up trash…"

Despite his illness, the winningest golfer in CNMI history has also found ways to give back to the sport that has given him so much.

"I'm done for good. I'm just helping the sport. I gave it up willingly and something I told myself that I'm done with. No regrets. I've enjoyed golf for over 20 years and the sport has allowed me to travel around the Pacific region," he said.

Wabol also continues to serve on the Northern Marianas Amateur Sports Association board and is spearheading the organization's fund drives and practice sessions for golf's participation in the 2015 Pacific Games in Papua New Guinea.

Wabol dominated the local golf scene for the better part of two decades—he still holds the lowest score of 65 in the CNMI—starting when he and good friend Satur came back from studying in the U.S. mainland in 1987. He studied college in Park View Community College, where he was a two-sport athlete in golf and baseball.

Of the new crop of par-busters, he likes the golf games of J.J. Atalig, Carl Hocog, Ned Norita, and Joey Dela Cruz—oddly all current and former baseball players like Wabol.

"I've always told Little League players that baseball can give them an opportunity to travel abroad but golf is another sport that could take you places. It's the same swing, same approach, it's the same thing," he said.

When asked what he misses most in the golf course, Wabol had a quick and ready answer—his friends.

"I miss the friendships I cultivated in golf the most. I miss Judge Manibusan, Nick Sablan, some of my Oriental friends, the Koreans. In fact, they're always asking for me. It's not really the competition that I miss because that wouldn't last," he said.

Wabol was, however, known as a very fierce competitor who always hated to lose.

"I condition myself not a day before a tournament but the Monday before the weekend tournament. You know what sets me apart from these guys—and I always tell them—it's here," pointing to his head. "No doubt you have the skill to hit the golf ball but when the nitty-gritty comes up, are you prepared for the last hole with one stroke down to beat this guy? Me? Oh boy, I savor those situations. For two-day tournaments like TOC (Tournament of Champions) I would always reserve my energy for the second day. So I try to be within striking distance on the first day," he said.

Of all the golf championships he'd won, Wabol is most proud of his performance in the 2001 South Pacific Mini Games in Norfolk Island.

"I finished fifth or sixth overall during those Games against the best in the Pacific. I scored in the 70s but had a bad day when I scored an 82. Otherwise without that high score I would've probably medaled."

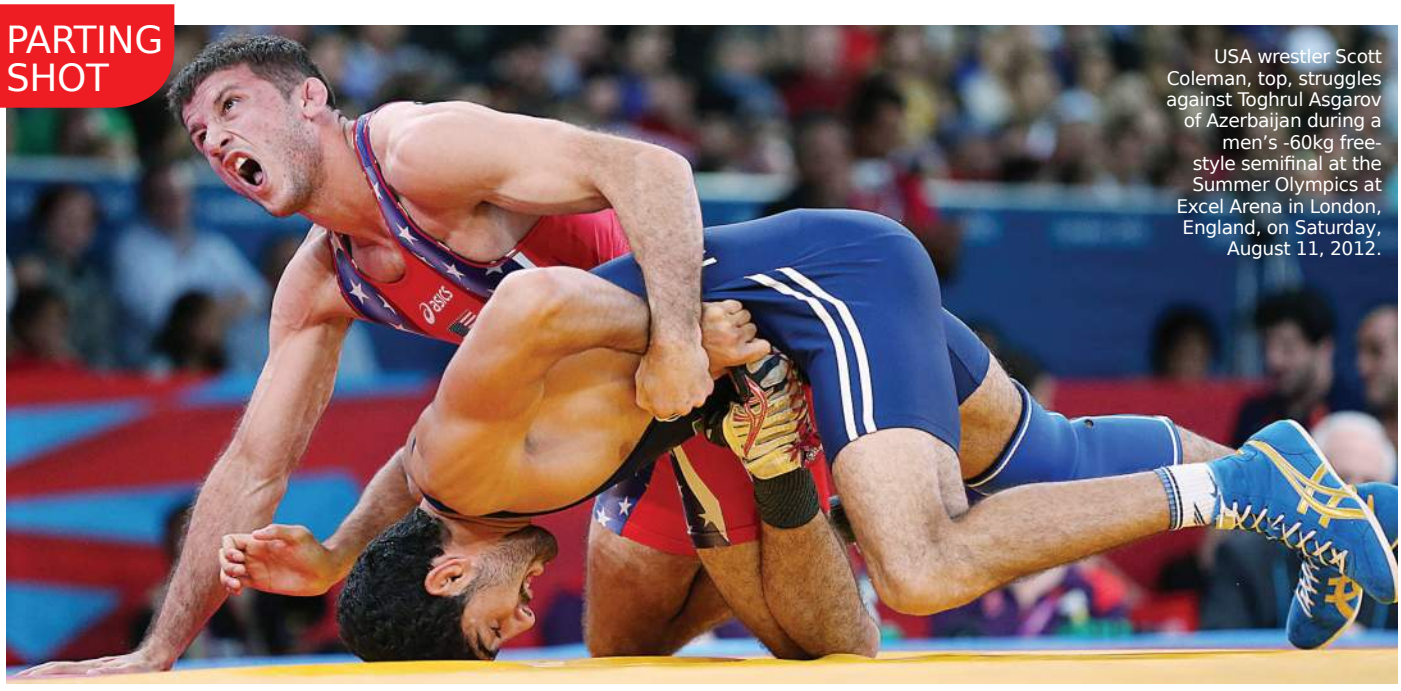
Aside from his mental approach, Wabol was also a standout because of his funky cross-hand swing that earned him the moniker Mr. Unorthodox.

"People just cannot believe my swing. They would doubt me until I hit the ball and it would travel far. I remember in New Caledonia in 2009, for instance, the announcer and the crowd right in front of the clubhouse were having a kick because of my cross swing, but I hit it low and long…that's when they realized I was the real deal and I got a lot of applause," he said.

He is reluctant, however, to pass on his unique swinging technique to the new generation of golfers.

"I wouldn't teach my cross-hand swing because people might get hurt. Some people in the past almost injured other people when their clubs flew away. It works for me but not necessarily for others," he said.

PARTING SHOT



USA wrestler Scott Coleman, top, struggles against Toghrul Asgarov of Azerbaijan during a men's -60kg freestyle semifinal at the Summer Olympics at Excel Arena in London, England, on Saturday, August 11, 2012.

ROBERT GAUTHIER/LOS ANGELES TIMES

WRESTLING FOR AN OLYMPIC SPOT

KEVIN CARMODY

The Gazette

In wrestling, an escape is worth only one point.

To escape elimination from the 2020 Olympics, and perhaps beyond, would be worth much more to this historic sport that was a part of the first Olympic Games in 1896.

The decision handed down by the International Olympic Committee to dump wrestling from the Olympic program caught everyone by surprise, especially in Colorado Springs, home of USA Wrestling, the national governing body for more than 160,000 members.

Weeks later, they're still surprised. And angry. And in utter disbelief that one of the oldest Olympic sports could be dropped after a final vote in September.

"I cannot see them taking one of oldest sports away," said Keith Sieracki, a two-time U.S. Olympic trials champion who is now a high school coach. "The Olympics is always out there as a dream. No matter what happens, whether you get there or not, it's a dream you can chase. They want to take that away."

Wrestlers and fans are fighting back in advance of a pair of key dates when decisions will be made on its Olympics future. The IOC executive board will meet in May in St. Petersburg, Russia, to decide which sport or sports to propose for 2020 inclusion. The final vote will be made at the IOC session in September in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

"We're fighting to save our sport," said Craig Sesker, USA Wrestling manager of communications.

Wrestling, along with a combined bid from baseball and softball, karate, squash, roller sports, sport climbing, wakeboarding and wushu will be vying for a single opening in 2020.

USA Wrestling recently launched a website, KeepWrestlingInTheOlympics.com, to assist supporters in their efforts for the cause. FILA, the international wrestling federation, added former U.S. Olympic Committee CEO Jim Scherr, a former Olympic freestyle wrestler, to the FILA bureau in effort to retain wrestling in the Olympics.

With that recent appointment, which also includes Russian legend Alexander Karelin and Pedro Gama Filho of Brazil, perhaps today's top wrestlers, such as high school champions Geordan Martinez of Pine Creek and AJ Rees of Discovery Canyon, can keep the Olympics in their dreams.

"If this happens, I'll be devastated," said Rees, a two-time Class 4A state champion. "Ever since I started wrestling, my dream was to be an Olympic gold medalist. If I don't end up doing something (in Rio de Janeiro) in 2016, knowing that I'll never get that chance again, it's going to be awful. The Olympics are it. It's the pinnacle of our sport."

Without precedent, business leaders found it difficult to project how much the Colorado Springs area might suffer without Olympic wrestling. But it would be a major loss.

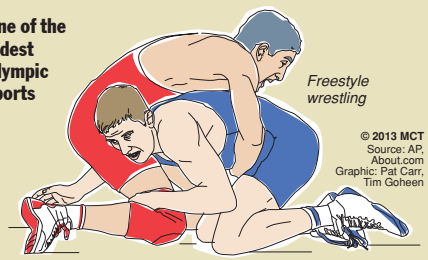
"It would definitely hurt since USA Wrestling has certainly been the center for Olympic wrestling in the country," said Tom Binnings, a senior partner at Summit Economics in Colorado Springs. "I know how big wrestling is around here, and it was real shock to hear about this. I doubt anyone has an answer yet as we're all still absorbing this."

Another coach reflected on what wrestling really means.

"We call it the Olympic Games, but wrestling is a competition," longtime Coronado wrestling coach Matt Brickell said. "It's man against man. It's never been a glamour sport, but it's just a great sport for kids, to learn what life is all about. You can be a poor kid, big, little or rich. It doesn't matter. If you have the drive and desire to be an Olympian, wresting should have a place to do that."

The International Olympic Committee has voted to eliminate wrestling from its list of 26 core sports, beginning in 2020.

One of the oldest Olympic sports



Freestyle wrestling

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Source: AP, About.com
Graphic: Pat Carr, Tim Goheen

1896 Greco-Roman style, with no holds below the waist and no using legs to gain points, is a sport at first modern Games

1904 Freestyle, which uses leg holds and most other standard techniques, introduced as a second wrestling event

1920 Standardized rules for both events initiated

1924 Time limits on matches imposed after an 11-hour match at the 1912 Games

2004 Women wrestlers compete for the first time

2012 In London, 344 athletes compete in 11 events in freestyle and seven in Greco-Roman

2013 After 2016 Games, wrestling will join baseball/softball, karate, squash, roller sports, sport climbing, wakeboarding and wushu in vying for a single spot

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